

**Testimony of Frank Stewart  
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California Fire Safe Council**

**Little Hoover Commission  
Governor Schwarzenegger's Reorganization Plan #1  
California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection  
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Originated in 1993 by the California Department of Forestry to augment efforts of their statewide Fire Prevention Education Program, the Fire Safe Council concept has developed into a broad-based public/private partnership. The California Fire Safe Council is a non profit 501(c) 3 organization that is mobilizing Californians through educational and action programs to protect their homes, communities and watersheds against wild-land fires.

There are over 150 Fire Safe Council's throughout the state and they are comprised from citizens, private property and home owners, local businesses and professional representatives from city, county, state and federal agencies. Sixty (60) of these councils are located in the Sierra Nevada's and are currently engaged in fire prevention and fuel reduction programs that are funded primarily through National Fire Plan grants, the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-determination Act and the new California Proposition 40 funds administered by CDF. Since 2001 these funds have been averaging \$12 million annually and with the addition of Prop-40 funds in 2005, these potential funding sources should average \$19-20 million per year through 2009.

Since the passage of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act in 2003, FSC's have been actively engaged in developing community and County Fire Plans that bring all of the stakeholders to the table to design strategies for the protection of at-risk communities and watersheds in their area. A major opportunity under the Act is the local development of the specific boundary of the at-risk community itself and the subsequently developed Wild-land Urban Interface (WUI) that extends outward from the community boundary. At a minimum, the Act defines the WUI to be ½ mile wide and as far as needed when established through collaborative efforts and displayed in a Community Wildfire Protection Plan and/or County Fire Plan.

To appreciate the scale of the hazardous fuel problem threatening the 1,200 at-risk communities in the Sierras, the following information was extrapolated from the Plumas County Fire Plan that was developed by the Plumas County Fire Safe Council. There are 54 at-risk communities in the county that are threatened by 170,000 acres of hazardous fuel conditions on private lands (41%) and national forest lands (57%). When these acres are multiplied by the number of counties in the Sierras, you begin to see the size of the hazardous fuel problem facing the citizens of California.

Since 2001, the PCFSC has received \$1.9 million of grant funding assistance for various hazardous fuel reduction projects that involve 1,611 acres of private property in 14 at-risk communities in Plumas County. To administer these fuel reduction projects and make sure they are in compliance with the law, five Registered Professional Foresters are under contract and work with the property owners in developing and implementing the projects.

With the exception of four projects, the private properties involved in these fuel reduction projects range from ½ to 5 acres in size and it takes a continuous string of properties to provide effective fire protection for at-risk community and an efficient operational cost for the contractors involved in these small projects.

In July of 2003, the Plumas County Board of Supervisors recognized the threat that hazardous fuel conditions on private and public lands presented to the citizens and communities in Plumas County. They petitioned Governor Davis for an Emergency Proclamation to “cut the red tape” in order for private property owners to reduce hazardous fuels in a timely fashion without the added costs of the expensive Timber Harvest Plan process. The proclamation request was not granted and the issue was turned over to the Board of Forestry for further review and consideration.

As such, early in 2004, the Plumas County Fire Safe Council and others worked with staff members of the Board of Forestry and took the issue to the Forest Practice Committee and full board for the development and adoption of an emergency regulation. The board acted swiftly and with full public participation in the development and adoption of the “Emergency Notice for Fuel Hazard Reduction, 2004” under section 14 CCR 1052 of the Forest Practice Rules.

The purpose of this regulation is to provide regulatory and financial relief for expedited hazard reduction of live and dead fuels near at-risk communities throughout the state. The 120 day exemption rule was adopted in June and again in October of 2004 and the board is currently taking public comment on the permanent adoption of this regulation.

We commend the Board of Forestry and staff for their prompt response to the needs of citizens and Fire Safe Councils and we support the efforts of the Governor to improve the productivity and accountability of state government. However, as the administration moves forward with its vision for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century government, it is crucial that the following concerns of citizens, small property owners and Fire Safe Councils be addressed and incorporated into the new government structure or re-affirmed in the function of the Board of Forestry:

- Citizen access and participation in the adoption of rules and regulations that impact their safety and protection of property and homes.
- Frequent public meetings that keep the public informed and involved in the development of policies, regulations and rules that impact citizen safety and wellbeing.
- Timely response period for adoption of rules and regulations that impact the safety and protection of citizens and property from wildfires.

- Adequate funding and authority provided to CDF and Department of Resources to perform the additional duties of this proposal.
- Protection from political agendas of special interest organizations that contribute to the election campaign of the governor and have influence on the subsequent appointment of agency and department Secretaries and Directors.
- Commitment from the administration, legislature, agencies and Board of Forestry for a public review of existing rules and regulations and a termination of those rules and processes that are duplicative, redundant and not effective in providing protection to the citizens, communities and watersheds from wildfire.
- Direction from Governor to Resource Department, CDF and Board of Forestry (if they are retained), that CDF Ranger Unit plans will be incorporated into County Fire Plans that are developed by County Fire Safe Councils and that these plans will meet the intent of the Community Wildfire Protection Plans authorized under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act.

Thank you for the opportunity to express the concerns of thousands of small private property owners who are actively engaged in local Fire Safe Councils and working towards protection of their property and communities from catastrophic forest fires.